

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 1118

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, US, XR

SUBJECT: THE USSR, DETENTE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

1. SUMMARY. THE ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM CONTINUES TO HAVE SERIOUS POTENTIAL FOR DISRUPTING US-SOVIET RELATIONS. HOWEVER, THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT MOSCOW IS STILL COMMITTED TO SEEKING ITS OBJECTIVES IN THE AREA BY A POLICY OF RELATIVE RESTRAINT BY ACQUIRING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT PROCESS THROUGH ITS POSITION AS CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. GENEVA CONTINUES TO RECIEVE STRONG PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SOVIET
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ENDORSEMENT, AND SOVIET ME POLICY DECISIONS ON SUCH MATTERS AS

BREZHNEV'S ME TRIP AND THE PLO SEEM STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY THE DESIRE TO KEEP THE GENEVA OPTION VIABLE. MOSCOW IS ALSO KEPT TO THIS COURSE BY THE LACK OF PROMISING ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE DANGERS OF A RENEWED OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES AND THE SOVIETS' LIMITED ABILITY TO USE THEIR CLIENTS IN THE AREA TO CURTAIL THE U.S.'S SOLO SETTLEMENT EFFORTS. SOVIET FRUSTRATION OVER EXCLUSION FROM THE ME SETTLEMENT PROCESS IS GROWING MARKEDLY. AS YET, HOWEVER, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT IS SUFFICIENT TO IMPEL THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TOWARD A MORE MEDDLESOME, ADVENTUROUS POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

2. WE THINK SOVIET POLICY OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WILL FOCUS ON EFFORTS TO INCREASE CHANCES THAT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WILL PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN THE NEXT STAGES OF ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. SOVIET PRESSURE ON EGYPT TO ACCEPT GENEVA IS LIKELY TO GROW IN ORDER TO BRING SADAT AROUND ON THIS KEY ISSUE. HOWEVER, IF THE USSR PERCEIVES THAT U.S. EFFORTS ARE SUBSTANTIALLY ERODING ITS ME INTERESTS, A GENERAL REVIEW OF THE SOVIETS' MIDDLE EAST POLICY MAY WELL TAKE PLACE. AFTER REJECTION OF THE TRADE ACT, WE THINK DETENTE CONSIDERATION WOULD WEIGHT LESS HEAVILY IN SUCH A REASSESSMENT THAN THEY HAVE IN THE PAST AND WOULD PROVIDE LESS INCENTIVE FOR MOSCOW TO CONTINUE A POLICY OF COMPARATIVE RESTRAINT IN THE MIDDLE EAST. EVEN IN SUCH A REASSESSMENT, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WOULD BE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS ABOUT INCREASING THE RISK OF ANOTHER WAR. END SUMMARY.

3. THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFRONTATION REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS AND POTENTIALLY MOST DISRUPTIVE INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS AFFECTING U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS. THE USSR'S STRONG COMMITMENT TO ITS MIDDLE EAST POSITION, WHICH MOSCOW DEMONSTRATED SO FORCEFULLY DURING THE OCTOBER WAR, HAS SHOWN NO SIGN OF DIMINISHING. THERE HAS SIMILARLY BEEN NO OUTWARD INDICATION THAT, IN THE EVENT OF ANOTHER ME ROUND OF HOSTILITIES, THE USSR, HOWEVER RELUCTANTLY, WOULD NOT AGAIN ACT BOLDLY TO DEFEND ITS INTERESTS EVEN WHEN SOVIET ACTIONS MIGHT IMPLY CONSIDERABLE RISK TO DETENTE AND TO U.S.-SOVIET REALATIONS.

4. HOWEVER, THE BALANCE OF EVIDENCE, WE BELIEVE, INDICATES THAT THE PRESENT SOVIET LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO SUPPORT A MIDDLE EAST POLICY WHICH SEEKS TO PROTECT AND ADVANCE SOVIET INTERESTS IN
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THE AREA BUT AT THE SAME TIME RESTRICTS THE POTENTIAL FOR U.S.-SOVIET CONFRONTATION. THIS DUAL OBJECTIVE HAS, SINCE THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 1973, FOCUSED SOVIET STRATEGY ON EXPANSION OF THE USSR'S ROLE IN THE ME SETTLEMENT PROCESS.

5. SINCE THE OCTOBER CEASEFIRE THE VEHICLE FOR SOVIET ACCESS TO THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS HAS BEEN AND IS THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST. THE SOVIETS' CO-CHAIRMANSHIP OF THIS FORUM

REMAINS CENTRAL TO SOVIET STRATEGY BECAUSE IT HOLDS OUT PROMISE OF FORMALIZED INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION THAT THE USSR, BOTH THROUGH THE MEPC DELIBERATIONS AND AS A CO-SPONSOR OF ANY GENEVA AGREEMENTS, MUST HAVE AN ACCEPTED VOICE IN MIDDLE EAST AFFAIRS. IT IS SEEN, IN ADDITION, AS THE VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH MOSCOW CAN CAST ITSELF AS THE DEFENDER OF ARAB INTERESTS BOTH AT THE CONFERENCE TABLE AND -- ASSUMING AGREEMENTS EMERGE -- IN THE SUBSEQUENT PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING A SETTLEMENT AND ADJUDICATING DISPUTES BETWEEN THE PARTIES TO IT.

6. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT MOSCOW'S COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVING ITS ME OBJECTIVES THROUGH THE GENEVA CONFERENCE REMAINS STRONG. SOVIET PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PRESS COMMENT CONTINUE TO PLACE THE RE-OPENING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AT THE FOREFRONT OF SOVIET INTERESTS. REFERENCE TO THE MEPC CONTINUES TO BE A MANDATORY ELEMENT OF SOVIET JOINT COMMUNIQUEs WITH OTHER STATES. PRIVATELY, SOVIET OFFICIALS HAVE ALSO CONTINUED TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF GENEVA. IN MY JANUARY 3 CONVERSATION WITH M.D. SYTENKO, CHIEF OF THE MFA NEAR EAST COUNTRIES DIVISION (MOSCOW 0119) HE STRESSED THAT THE MEPC IS THE ONLY FORUM WHICH CAN RESOLVE THE ME CRISIS AND THAT TO DELAY ITS REOPENING RUNS THE RISK OF A FURTHER OUT-BREAK OF HOSTILITIES.

7. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, SOVIET POLICY DECISIONS ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST SUGGEST THAT MOSCOW IS STILL SHAPING ITS RESPONSE TO MIDDLE EAST EVENTS TO KEEP THE GENEVA ROAD OPEN OR TO CLEAR IT OF OBSTACLES. AVAILABLE EVIDENCE STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT THE SOVIET DECISION TO CANCEL BREZHNEV'S EGYPTIAN VISIT WAS CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH SADAT'S CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR THE U.S.'S STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TOWARD THE NEXT STAGES OF A SETTLEMENT. MOSCOW WAS EVIDENTLY UNWILLING TO CARRY THROUGH ON THE CAIRO SUMMIT WITHOUT ASSURANCE THAT BREZHNEV COULD BRING HOME EGYPTIAN CONCURRENCE TO GET GENEVA GOING AGAIN AND TO ESTABLISH THE SOVIETS FIRMLY IN

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THE NEXT STAGES OF THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS.

8. THE SOVIETS' CAUTIOUS POLICY TOWARD THE PLO HAS A GENEVA INGREDIENT. WHILE SOVIET PUBLIC AND PRIVATE STATEMENTS NOW INSIST THAT THE PLO MUST BE INCLUDED AT GENEVA, MOSCOW HAS CAREFULLY RESISTED ESTABLISHING A FIXED POSITION ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE PLO'S PARTICIPATION. ARAFAT AND COMPANY ALSO ARE STILL DENIED SOVIET RECOGNITION AS THE "SOLE" REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. AND, SO FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, MOSCOW IS STILL THROWING COLD WATER ON THE IDEA OF A PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE. ON MATTERS OF GENERAL ME POLICY THE SOVIETS, AS BEFORE CONTINUE TO REFUSE ENDORSEMENT OF PALESTINAIN EXTREMIST VIEWS AND TO STRESS THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL. THIS SOVIET RESTRAINT, OF COURSE, MAY IN PART REFLECT SOVIET UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE PLO'S FUTURE VIABILITY AND ARAFAT'S

ABILITY TO MAKE HIS ORGANIZATION A PERMANENT INFLUENCE. HOWEVER, IT ALSO INDICATES THAT MOSCOW IS NOT WILLING TO PREJUDICE ITS HOPED-FOR GENEVA OPTION BY PREMATURE DECLARATIONS OF SUPPORT FOR THE PLO WHICH MIGHT FORECLOSE CHANCES OF RECONVENING THE MEPC INDEFINITELY.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6572

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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9. MOSCOW IS UNDOUBTEDLY CHAFING AT THE CONTINUED POSTPONEMENT OF GENEVA. BUT THE ABSENCE OF PROMISING ALTERNATIVES TO THE USSR'S CURRENT COURSE ACTS AS A DETERRENT TO OTHER POTENTIALLY MORE ACTIVE OR ADVENTUROUS POLICIES. A NEW MIDDLE EAST WAR WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY ENTAIL NO LESS RISK OF U.S.-SOVIET CONFRONTATION THAN THE OCTOBER 1973 HOSTILITIES AND PERHAPS EVEN GREATER RISK. MOREOVER, IT IS DIFFICULT TO DISCERN WHERE LARGER SOVIET INTERESTS WOULD PROFIT FROM ANOTHER ME ROUND OR WHERE THE

USSR COULD HOPE TO GAIN GREATER POTENTIAL FOR SECURING ITS INTERESTS THAN THAT ACHIEVED AFTER THE OCTOBER WAR. MOSCOW COULD BY NO MEANS COUNT ON A GREATER ROLE IN SETTLING THE CRISIS THAN THAT THE USSR ACQUIRED AFTER OCTOBER. INDEED, IF ISREAL INFLICTED SERIOUS LOSSES ON THE ARAB SIDE, THE SOVIETS MIGHT WELL RECEIVE

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THE BLAME FOR ARAB FAILURES. AND THEY WOULD ALSO BE FACED WITH ARMS RESUPPLY PROBLEMS POTENTIALLY EVEN GREATER THAN THOSE WHICH FOLLOWED THE LAST WAR.

10. THE SOVIET'S ABILITY TO USE THEIR CLIENTS IN THE AREA ALSO APPEARS CIRCUMSCRIBED. MOSCOW'S ABILITY TO INFLUENCE SYRIA'S ATTITUDES TOWARD U.S. SETTLEMENT EFFORTS IS PROBABLY LIMITED. ANY ATTEMPT TO BRING PRESSURE ON ASAD BY A BOLD USE OF THE LEVERAGE MOSCOW ENJOYS AS SYRIA'S ARMS SUPPLIER WOULD PROBABLY ENTAIL A SUBSTANTIAL RISK OF YIELDING A COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE BACKLASH. SIMILARLY, IF THE SOVIETS WERE TO ENCOURAGE THE PLO TO UNDERTAKE MORE ACTIVE EFFORTS TO SABOTAGE CURRENT U.S. SETTLEMENT EFFORTS, THIS TOO WOULD ENTAIL A RISK OF ALIENATING EGYPT EVEN FURTHER AND OF POTENTIALLY STRAINING MOSCOW'S RELATIONS WITH SYRIA. AT PRESENT, DESPITE MOSCOW'S CONTINUED ALLUSIONS TO THE POTENCY OF THE ARABS' OIL WEAPON, THE SOVIETS ALSO HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE WITH THE ME COUNTRIES MOST CAPABLE OF DICTATING ITS USE.

11. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER,, IT IS APPARENT THAT SOVIET FRUSTRATION OVER EXCLUSION FROM THE ME SETTLEMENT PROCESS CONTAINS A LARGE INGREDIENT OF DISTRUST OF U.S. INTENTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. PUBLIC ATTACKS ON U.S. POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST HAVE INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS, REACHING NEARLY CRESCENDO PROPORTIONS IN THE CONTINUING HEAVY BROADSIDE DIRECTED AT U.S. STATEMENTS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE USE OF FORCE IN THE EVENT OF AN OIL PRODUCER EFFORT TO STRANGLE THE WESTERN ECONOMIES. PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE U.S.'S POLICY OF "QUITE DIPLOMACY" AND THE STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TOWARD THE NEXT STAGES OF A SETTLEMENT HAVE ALSO BECOME MORE POINTED. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN HINTS THAT THE U.S. HAS FAILED TO LIVE UP TO UNSPECIFIED UNDERSTANDINGS WITH THE USSR ON THE ME. PRIVATELY, SOVIET OFFICIALS HAVE DENIGRATED THE U.S.'S SOLO EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE PROGRESS IN THE ME OR, MORE OMINOUSLY, HAVE SUGGESTED THAT CONTINUED RELIANCE ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PARTIAL MEASURES IS FUELING DANGEROUS SUSPICION AMONG THE PARTIES TO THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT AND MAY LEAD TO A RENEWAL OF HOSTILITIES.

12. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THESE INDICATIONS OF SOVIET FRUSTRATION ADD UP TO IMPORTANT EVIDENCE THAT THE USSR IS YET PREPARED TO RISK A MORE MEDDLESOME, ADVENTUROUS POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. RATHER, WE BELIEVE THAT SOVIET POLICY IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS IS LIKELY TO BE FOCUSED ON EFFORTS TO INCREASE THE CHANCES THAT

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THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WILL EMERGE AS THE FORUM FOR FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS. THE SOVIET APPROACH TO A SECOND EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT IS LIKELY TO BE CAUTIOUS. MOSCOW MAY BE EXPECTED TO DO NOTHING TO ENCOURAGE AN EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI ACCORD, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF SADAT'S WARNINGS THAT TIME IS LIMITED. HOWEVER, MOSCOW ALSO PROBABLY IS CERTAIN THAT ITS INFLUENCE WITH SADAT IS NOT NOW SUFFICIENT TO PREVENT AN AGREEMENT. THE USSR WILL THUS PROBABLY SEEK TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON EGYPT TO INSURE THAT ANY AGREEMENT WHICH MAY EMERGE WILL INCREASE THE CHANCES OF RECONVENING GENEVA. WITH AN EYE TO ENCOURAGING SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN SUSPICIONS, THE SOVIETS MAY BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE THEIR WARNINGS ABOUT POSSIBLE EGYPTIAN ABANDONMENT OF ITS ARAB ALLIES. THE SOVIETS WILL, THUS, ATTEMPT TO LIMIT SADAT'S MANEUVERABILITY, AND, IF POSSIBLE, TRY TO ASSURE THAT HIS NEGOTIATING SCENARIO WILL NOT BE A REPETITION OF THE FIRST EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI ROUND LAST WINTER. ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON SADAT MAY ALSO BE SOUGHT BY MOSCOW'S CONTINUED PURSUIT OF BETTER RELATIONS WITH LIBYA, AND BY MORE DIRECT EMPLOYMENT OF THE BILATERAL LEVERS (E.G., EGYPTIAN ARMS NEEDS, DEBT OBLIGATIONS, ECT) WHICH MOSCOW STILL POSSESSES.

13. SEEN IN THE NEAR TERM, WE BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WILL REMAIN COMMITTED TO ITS PRESENT POLICY. HOWEVER, IF THE USSR PERCEIVES IN THE MONTHS AHEAD THAT U.S. SOLO EFFORTS IN THE ME ARE SUBSTANTIALLY ERODING ITS POSITION, THIS FRUSTRATION MAY WELL LEAD TO A GENERAL REVIEW OF THE SOVIET COMMITMENT TO ITS CURRENT STRATEGY. AFTER SOVIET REJECTION OF THE TRADE ACT, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT, IN SUCH A REVIEW, DETENTE CONSIDERATIONS WOULD WEIGH LESS HEAVILY THAN THEY HAVE IN THE PAST YEAR. THERE MIGHT BE STRONG SENTIMENT TO EXCLUDE SOVIET MIDDLE EAST POLICY FROM THE DETENTE UMBRELLA BECAUSE ITS INCLUSION WAS EXACTING TOO GREAT A COST TO SOVIET INTERESTS. SUCH SENTIMENT WOULD BE A GREATER FACTOR IF THE ME ISSUE GOT CAUGHT UP IN A SUCCESSION STRUGGLE. A REASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SOVIET POLICY OF RESTRAINT IN THE MIDDLE EAST WOULD PROBABLY POSIT AN ALTERNATIVE POLICY OF SEEKING ACTIVELY TO DISRUPT FURTHER SETTLEMENT EFFORTS WITHOUT SOVIET PARTICIPATION OR OF FREEZING THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION UNTIL SUCH PARTICIPATION BECAME MANDATORY. EVEN IN THE EVENT OF SUCH REASSESSMENT, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WOULD CONTINUE TO BE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS ABOUT ADOPTING A POLICY WHICH WOULD SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE THE RISK OF ANOTHER MAJOR WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

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